

Message Text

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SUBJECT: DROUGHT RELIEF EFFORT IN NORTHWEST HAITI: AMBASSADOR'S
OBSERVATIONS

1. FOLLOWING ARE MY OBSERVATIONS BASED ON TWO INSPECTION TRIPS
MAY 29 AND JUNE 6 TO DROUGHT-AFFLICTED AREAS OF NORTHWEST (MOLE ST.
NICHOLAS, ANSE-ROUGE) ACCOMPANIED BY CARE/HACHO REPS AND
HAITIAN RED CROSS CHAIRMAN DR. VICTOR LAROCHE.

2. EXTENT OF NEED. FROM THE AIR THIS WHOLE REGION, RUNNING ROUGH-
LY IN A LINE GONAIVES-PORT DE PAIX, IS STRIKINGLY ARID AND PARCHED,
RELIEVED BY GREEN ONLY IN A FEW ISOLATED AREAS OF SPRINGS OR SMALL
RIVERS WELL BELOW THEIR NORMAL LEVELS. ON THE GROUND AT MOLE ST.
NICHOLAS EVEN THE CACTI DROOP AND SHRIVEL. WHERE THERE IS WATER,
ONE CALABASH FULL FETCHES NEARLY TWO GOURDES (40 CENTS U.S.), MORE
THAN THE AVERAGE PEASANT MAKES IN A DAY. IN MARKETS BASIC STAPLES
ARE SCARCE AND PRICED BEYOND NORMAL REACH, E.G., ONE MARMITE
OF RICE AT MOLE WAS 12 GOURDES, TRIPLE THE PRICE IN PORT AU PRINCE.
IT IS DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE NUMBER OF RECENT DROUGHT-RELATED
DEATHS (MALNUTRITION IS A CONSTANT HERE, AND LOCAL OFFICIALS ARE
RELUCTANT TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT), BUT HACHO REPS AND OTHERS IN
AREA REPORT SCATTERED DEATHS, EIGHT HERE, 12 THERE, ETC. SO THAT
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ONE COULD HAZARD A TOLL OF AT LEAST 50 AND PERHAPS AS MANY AS 100,

WITH MORE IN PROSPECT UNLESS THIS RELIEF EFFORT SUCCEEDS.

3. PREPARATIONS FOR FOOD DISTRIBUTION. THANKS TO THE EFFECTIVE JOINT PLANNING OF HAITIAN ORGANIZATIONS, U.S. VOLAGS, AND AID AND TO THE ABLE COMMUNITY COUNCILS ORGANIZED WITH HACHO ASSISTANCE OVER THE YEARS, THE SELECTION OF THE NEEDIEST FAMILIES TO RECEIVE RATION CARDS HAS PROCEEDED CAREFULLY AND, BY ALL EVIDENCE, EQUITABLY.

4. DISTRIBUTION. AT THE ANSE ROUGE DISTRIBUTION CENTER, BULGUR, CORN FLOUR, AND COOKING OIL WERE BEING EFFICIENTLY APPORTIONED TO RATION CARD BEARING RECIPIENTS UNDER EYE OF LOCAL COMMITTEE DESIGNATED BY DR. LAROCHE'S CENTRAL RELIEF COMMITTEE. THE SCENE WAS ORDERLY AND CALM, WITH A MINIMUM OF SHOVING OR IMPATIENCE. OBSERVERS REPORTED FEW COMPLAINTS ABOUT EITHER FAIRNESS OR METHOD OF DISTRIBUTION. A POTENTIAL PROBLEM COULD BE THE DISSATISFACTION OF THOSE WHO ARE NOT IN MOST CRITICALLY AFFECTED CATEGORIES (E.G., PREGNANT AND NURSING MOTHERS, ELDERLY PEOPLE, MOTHERS WITH LARGE FAMILIES) AND THUS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR RATIONS, BUT ONLY WAY TO BROADEN DISTRIBUTION BASE WOULD BE TO LOWER RATION FROM PRESENT 1000 CALORIE PER DAY LEVEL, AND HAITIAN MEDICAL AUTHORITIES WOULD BE RELUCTANT TO CONTEMPLATE THIS AT PRESENT.

5. TRANSPORTATION. THUS FAR 150-TON DAILY SHIPMENT FROM PORT-AU-PRINCE TO GONAIVES HAS GONE WELL, BUT SHORTAGE OF TRUCKS HAS DEVELOPED AT GONAIVES, AND MEASURES TO AUGMENT VEHICLE POOL ARE BEING TAKEN BY GOH.

6. PRESS COVERAGE. AN AP STORY FILED BY MIAMI-BASED CORRESPONDENT AND CARRIED IN BOTH N.Y. TIMES AND MIAMI HERALD JUNE 8 PROVIDES ACCURATE PICTURE OF SITUATION. A TWO-MAN CBS TEAM ARRIVED IN HAITI JUNE 9, RECEIVED EMBASSY BRIEFING, AND WILL BE ACCOMPANIED TO NORTHWEST BY MOST EXPERIENCED CARE REP ROGER DUNWELL, WHO KNOWS AREA WELL FROM PREVIOUS HACHO ASSIGNMENT. I HAVE ASKED TEAM TO SEE ME AGAIN UPON THEIR RETURN AT WEEK'S END.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR LONGER TERM. ONE IS AGAIN STRUCK, UPON RE-VISITING THIS SINGULARLY ARID REGION, BY THE FORTITUDE OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE HEROIC EFFORTS BEING MADE AT COMMUNITY ACTION PROJECTS UNDER HACHO'S AEGIS, BUT ABOVE ALL BY THE NEED TO MOUNT A LONG-RANGE, REGIONALLY- ORIENTED AND INNOVATIVE DEVELOPMENT EFFORT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IF THIS REGION, WHERE OVER 300,000 PEOPLE LIVE, IS NOT TO BECOME A CHRONIC DISASTER AREA IN THIS "POOREST OF THE POOR" COUNTRY OF HEMISPHERE. WATER--BOTH FOR DRINKING AND FOR AGRICULTURE--IS THE KEY. SPRINGS DO EXIST--BUT THEY ARE USUALLY REMOTE FROM SETTLEMENTS AND TO TAP THEM WOULD REQUIRE EXTENSIVE INVESTMENT IN PLASTIC OR STEEL PIPELINES. RAINFALL (AT LEAST IN NORMAL TIMES) COULD BE CHANNELLED INTO CATCHMENTS AND RESERVOIRS FOR IRRIGATION PURPOSES, BUT ENGINEERING SURVEYS AND BUILDING MATERIALS ARE REQUIRED (THE

MANPOWER IS THERE). TREES STILL EXIST, BUT ARE RAPIDLY DISAPPEAR-
ING AS PEASANTS INTENSIFY THEIR CUTTING TO MAKE CHARCOAL-TYPICALLY
THEIR SOLE SOURCE OF CASH. FOR YEARS INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES HAVE
DISCUSSED AND STUDIED FEASIBILITY OF MANUFACTURING LIGNITE BRIQUETTES
FROM EXTENSIVE, HIGH-QUALITY DEPOSITS AT MAISSADE, BUT PROSPECTS
FOR EARLY EVALUATION AND ACTION ARE NOT ENCOURAGING. WIND POWER,
PARTICULARLY ALONG THE NORTHERN COASTLINE, IS A PROMISING ENERGY
SOURCE FOR BOTH ELECTRICITY AND WATER PUMPS, AS THE AMERICAN
MISSIONARY AT MOLE ST. NICLOAS HAS DEMONSTRATED. HE USES TWO
INEXPENSIVE, EASILY MAINTAINED, BUT CAREFULLY DESIGNED, WINDMILLS
MANUFACTURED IN U.S.

8. CONCLUSION: THE DROUGHT IN NORTHWEST HAITI HAS SERVED TO HIGH-
LIGHT THE PROBLEMS OF THIS PERENNIALY ARID REGION AND HAS LENT
NEW URGENCY TO THE TASK OF DEVISING A COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGY FOR THE REGION, BRINGING TO BEAR IMAGINATIVE BUT EASILY
MAINTAINABLE SMALL-SCALE TECHNOLOGIES AND SYSTEMS. THIS WOULD,
OF COURSE, HAVE RELEVANCE ELSEWHERE IN HAITI'S STRUGGLING RURAL
AREAS. IT SHOULD NOT BE BEYOND THE CAPACITY OF THE INTERNATION-
AL AGENCIES, AID, THE VOLUNTARY AGENCIES, AND PERHAPS ONE OR TWO
INTERESTED FRIENDLY GOVERNMENTS SUCH AS GERMAN FEDERAL REPUBLIC AND
FRANCE, TO JOIN EFFORTS MORE RATIONALLY AND PURPOSEFULLY WITH
THE GOH IN ORDER TO REVERSE DECIVELY NORTHWEST HAITI'S DRIFT
TOWARD BECOMING A DESERT IN THE CARIBBEAN. SUCH AN EFFORT WOULD
SEEM PARTICULARLY CONSISTENT WIT RIOLICY ENUNCIATED BY ADMINIS-
TRATOR PARKER IN JUNE 9 CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY THAT AID IS IN-
CREASINGLY ENDEAVORING THE INVEST ITS RESOURCES TO THE MAXIMUM
EXTENT POSSIBLE IN LONG-TERM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS RATHER
THAN IN SHORT-TERM RELIEF ACTIVITIES. UPON RETURN OF AIDREP
BEHOTEGUY JUNE 16 I SHALL SUBMIT SPECIFIC PROPOSALS FOR WASHINGTON'S
CONSIDERATION.

9. AID MAY DRAW ON FOREGOING IN PREPARING STATEMENTS FOR FUNDING
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CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS.
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